

## **LISTING OF THE CLAIMS**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A metal powder production process [[by]] using a metal compound powder as a raw material and reducing said metal compound powder, said process comprising:

a molding step in which the metal compound powder is mixed with a binder and a reaction agent, is molded, and is sintered to produce a metal compound feed compact; **and**

a reducing step in which a metal is formed by reducing the metal compound feed compact by contacting the metal compound feed compact with an active metal as a reducing agent, and

a separation step in which the metal formed in the reducing step is separated from a surplus of active metal, by-products and a surplus of the reaction agent included in the metal compound feed compact, wherein

in the reducing step the active metal is arranged at a distance from the metal compound feed compact and vaporized by heating so that the vaporized active metal is supplied to the metal compound feed compact;

in the reducing step, a plurality of metal compound feed compacts are arranged in a sealed reaction device in such a manner as to diffuse the vaporized active metal among the metal compound feed compacts so that the plurality of metal compound feed compacts simultaneously come into contact with the vaporized active metal, and do not contact the inner wall of the reaction device due to being supported with a supporting device;

the shape of the metal compound feed compacts before and after the reducing step is substantially the same; and

the reaction agent is at least one compound of an active metal selected from calcium, magnesium, sodium, barium and potassium.

2. (Original) A metal powder production process according to claim 1 wherein a niobium compound is used as the metal compound.

3. (Original) A metal powder production process according to claim 1 wherein a tantalum

compound is used as the metal compound.

4. (Currently Amended) A metal powder production process according to claim 1 wherein a compound of a metal element selected from zirconium, titanium, hafnium, rare earth metal and [[or]] actinide metal is used as the metal compound.

5. (Canceled)

6. (Original) A metal powder production process according to claim 1 wherein at least one active metal selected from calcium, magnesium, sodium, barium and potassium is used as the reducing agent.

7. (Canceled)

8. (Original) A metal powder production process according to claim 2 wherein one selected from a niobium oxide and niobium halide is used as the niobium compound.

9. (Currently Amended) A metal powder production process according to claim 1 wherein the temperature of the metal compound feed compact in the reducing step is ~~600 to 1300~~ 800 to 1,000 °C.

10. (Currently Amended) A metal powder production process according to claim 1 wherein in the molding step, the metal compound feed compact is molded into shape in which the distance from an arbitrary location within the metal compound feed compact to the surface of the compact is ~~not longer than 10 mm~~: 2 to 5 mm.

11. (Original) A metal powder production process according to claim 1 wherein a step is additionally contained in which the metal formed in the reducing step is separated from the active metal and by-products by acid treatment.

12. (Withdrawn) A metal compound feed compact comprised by mixing a metal compound and a binder, molding, and firing; wherein

the distance from an arbitrary location within the compact to the surface of the compact is not longer than 10 mm.

13. (Withdrawn) A metal compound feed compact according to claim 12 wherein the metal compound contains a compound raw material of a metal element selected from niobium, zirconium, titanium, hafnium, tantalum, rare earth metal and actinide metal.

14. (Withdrawn) A metal compound feed compact according to claim 12 wherein the metal compound feed compact contains at least one compound of a metal selected from calcium, magnesium, sodium, barium and potassium as the reaction agent.

15. (Withdrawn) A metal compound feed compact according to claim 14 wherein the reaction agent is one selected from an oxide, halide, and carbonate of at least one metal selected from calcium, magnesium, sodium, barium and potassium.

16. (Previously Presented) The metal powder production process according to claim 1, wherein:  
the reaction agent is at least one selected from the group consisting of oxide, halide, carbonate, hydroxide, chloride and fluoride of the active metal.

17. (Currently Amended) The metal powder production process according to claim 1, wherein:  
the mixing ratio of the reaction agent is that cations in the reaction agent are blended at more than 0 moles and not more than 2 moles 0.5 to 1 mole with respect to 1 mole of the metal contained in the metal compound feed compact.

18. (Previously Presented) The metal powder production process according to claim 1, wherein:  
the metal compound feed compact has the shape of a wire, in which the distance between the outer periphery and the center in a cross-section that is perpendicular to the center line in the direction of length is not longer than 10 mm.

Please add the following new claims:

19. (New) The metal powder production process according to claim 1, wherein the mixing ratio of metal compound in the metal compound feed compact is not less than 10% by weight.
20. (New) The metal powder production process according to claim 1, wherein the content of the active metal is at 50 to 400 parts by weight with respect to 100 parts by weight of the metal compound feed compact.